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No 88

An

Inaugural Dissertation

on

Hydrothorax

by

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of Virginia

Passed March 22d 1823

March 3rd 1823.

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Hydrothorax

Dropsy is defined to be a preternatural collection of serous or watery fluid in the cellular substance or different cavities of the body. It receives different appellations according to the particular situation in which it is lodged, when located in the cavity of the chest it is called Hydro=thorax or Hydrops Pectoris, it is of this form that I propose to treat

This is a disease of ancient date, and has been placed among the opprobria Medicorum of the Healing Art, among many others we have the high authority of Cullen who sais it is incura=ble, altho' not prepared to go so far, I can readily believe that it is one of those diseases, in which we will often find our remedies unavailing, and in some cases not even palliative, yet in some in=stances we have checked its progress and in a few cases effected an entire cure

Dropsies are among those diseases, which are extremely difficult to manage, and Hydrothorax

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has generally been considered one of its most in=
=tractable forms. whether it is the most unmana=
=geable of the dropsies or not, there exists the discor=
=dant testimony of Practitioners. That it was so
was almost universally admitted by the Ancients,
and even to a late period, but since there has been
a revolution in its treatment, it is considered as
that form in which we shall be left baffled in
our attempts to cure. This discrepancy of sentiment
can only be reconciled by supposing the present
plan of treatment is more successful than that
formerly adopted

The Symptoms characteristic of Hydro=
=thorax are difficulty of breathing with
oppression of the Breast, particularly on motion
or whilst in a horizontal posture, sudden star=
=tings from sleep with Palpitation, Anxiety, irregular
pulse, pale countenance, Oedema of lower extremities
cough, sometimes Syncope, and a dimination of
the secretion of Urine which if allowed to stand

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deposites a pink coloured sediment, besides these symptoms the patient when proforming certain motions is sensible of evident fluctuation in the cavity of the thorax

Corvisart considered fluctuation (which may be perceived by striking the sternum whilst in an erect position) as the most certain and distinguishing symptoms

The late ingenious Bichat mentions that all the symptoms are agravated by pressure on the abdomen and this he considers as the best diagnostic

By attending to the symptoms before enumerated conjoined with these last Hydrothorax may be distinguished

The Diseases with which it is most liable to be confounded, are, Asthma, Emphysema, Angina Pec=toris and organic affections of the Heart & Aorta

Its Causes are indulgence in spirituous liquors, ex=cesses and long continued evacuations, schirosity of the Liver, Spleen, Pancreas, and other viscera

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of the Abdomen, also preceding diseases, as Intermittants, Asthma, Pulmonary Consumption, Dysentary, Diarrhoea, Gout, some of the Exanthemata especially Scarlatina, suppression of accustomed evacuation or repulsion of some eruption, and numerous other causes, among the most frequent causes (tho' not generally mentioned by writers) are ill cured pleurisy and protracted catarrh

The manner in which Hydrothorax is produced by these affections is very obvious. The Lungs in both being in a state of inflamation and consequently engorged, the circulation endeavouring to relieve itself from this state of oppression throws out effusions, which the absorbents not taking up collects constituting the disease in question

In every cavity of the body a fluid is continually thrown out by the exhalents, which, taken up by the absorbents, Dropsy may therefore be produced in two ways: first by exhalents throwing out of more than a usual quantity, while the absorbents are

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[illegible]

Treatment. [illegible]

[illegible]

It is sometimes used to the exclusion of general [illegible] letting [illegible] but [illegible] where [illegible] [illegible] which [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] bronchitis [illegible] condition [illegible] [illegible] ~~[illegible]~~ [illegible]

Emetics [illegible] at one time were considered [illegible] so much [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] those who had [illegible] [illegible] they would in some cases be [illegible] considerable [illegible] disorder [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] probable that [illegible] [illegible] besides [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

It [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

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still we should not overload the stomach.

Concerning Drinks there was at one time great diversity of sentiment. One set of Practitioners forbid the use of fluids altogether, whilst another set allowed them to be drank very profusely, and even enjoined a considerable quantity to be taken. It was stated by the former, that absolute cures had been effected by abstinence from drink. It is I believe now fully ascertained, that it may be indulged in, moderately, not only with impunity but with decided utility. It was formerly supposed that drinks were injurious by increasing the watery parts of the blood and thereby encouraging effusion, but the opinion now prevalent, and which seems to be founded on actual observation and experience is that by not allowing fluids, the Kidney became so inactive as to perform their office very imperfectly, and by permitting drinks the Kidneys are stimulated to secrete more copiously and thereby promote absorption and lessen the effusion

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besides that it affords relief by quenching the al-
-most unsupportable thirst which attends, but too much
however should not be taken at once, for the reasons be-
-fore mentioned

The Diuretics should consist of water impregnated with
Tartaric, Citric acid, or any of the vegetable acids.
In the atonic form of Hydrothorax the patients may be
allowed Whiskey and Water or Gin & Water, Sir George
Baker, Sir Francis Milman and Cullen have all witnes
their beneficial effects.

I have now finished the history of the Symptoms
and treatment of Hydrothorax, which I conceive will
apply to the generality of cases as they are usually
met with. Like other diseases Hydrothorax is so
much modified by various causes that it would be
impossible for me at this time to treat of it more fully
I forbear to say more, in the expectation that this im-
-perfect essay written solely in conformity to the regula-
-tions of the School, may be found to answer the
purpose for which it is intended.

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